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Lisa Robinson

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Institute of Museum Services

accreditation

A Federal agency serving the nation's museums

Office of the Director • 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20506 • (202) 786-0536

October 17, 1989

Sandy Crary
Subcommittee on Education,
Arts and Humanities
SD-648 Dirksen Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Sandy:

Rebecca Danvers and Mamie Bittner suggested that I write to you to provide additional information on museum accreditation. This accreditation differs significantly from the accreditation of postsecondary schools, for example in the number of museums accredited and in the number and sources of accreditation. Also, there is no legal requirement that museums be accredited, and many excellent museums may choose not to invest in the accreditation process. For these and other reasons we do not give accredited institutions extra points in the General Operating Support competition nor do we make it part of the evaluation criteria.

More detailed information is provided below.

1. Very few museums are accredited. As of June 1989, 683 museums were accredited by the American Association of Museums (AAM). This is a very small proportion of U.S. museums -- the AAM museum directory lists over 6,700 museums and almost 2,000 apply to IMS programs each year.

2. While there are many sources of standards for museum operations, there are only two groups that provide formal accreditation. The two groups providing formal accreditation are the AAM and the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums. The American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboretums and the National Science Foundation designated AAM as their accrediting body. Some associations in other museum disciplines work with AAM on accrediting issues, and most are involved formally or informally in developing professional standards for their members.

3. Many excellent museums choose not to participate in the accreditation process. While accreditation can assist a museum in improving its operations or provide a "seal of approval", many museums decide to forego the process. They can receive assistance through many other mechanisms (including the IMS Museum Assessment Program) and there are many other sources of prestige. The cost of accreditation may also discourage museums from undertaking, the total for AAM accreditation is over \$1,000 (a one-time fee of \$200.00, plus \$150.00 per year, plus the costs of the visiting committee which average \$950.00).

Please give me a call if you have any additional questions. I have attached some of the literature from AAM for your information.

Sincerely,



Lisa Robinson
Director of Policy, Planning and Budget